



The second debate:



“hoist on his own petard” Hamlet III, iv¹

The second debate drew a marginally bigger audience than the first, outscoring the Simpsons, Pokemon and the pre-World Cup sports programs, but not the soap operas. The soaps, as generally happens, outscored the debate by more than two to three times the audience, depending on the exact time of measurement. (Check our Bulletin Series 5 Number 15 for an appendix describing the audience size corresponding to rating points.)

Rating points



Source: IPOBE AGB June 8, 2006

The pre-debate

The two principal candidates arrived at the debate with most polls showing them dead even. In general, the common wisdom held that the momentum Calderón was counting on had slowed or reversed, and the big push upward López Obrador partisans were predicting had yet to appear. (See page 3-4 of this bulletin for the main published post debate polls, and page 8 of this bulletin for the updated summary of published polls in 2006 up to the eve of the debate).

An odd drama played out on the eve of the debate when jailed businessman Carlos Ahumada announced through his wife that five additional videos (showing PRD or GDF personalities) would be presented at noon the day of the debate. The projection was that these videos would damage the image of AMLO.



¹ Shakespeare's Hamlet was referring to an aspect of siege warfare in the use of bombs, often clumsily made and which could blow up in the hand of someone carrying it. Here, we refer to being involved in the danger that one meant for another, in the context of negative campaigning.



The anticipated showing of the videos was hyped by a handful of columnists over the previous weekend, and trumpeted by Reforma on Monday the day previous to the debate. None of the columnists, including those of Reforma, had seen the videos, but they breathlessly passed on information given them by lawyers for Ahumada. AMLO and his team, said by some media to be nervous, nonetheless urged that the videos be shown.

By Tuesday morning the bubble burst with a bizarre early morning “attack” on the wife of Ahumada, which was the basis for her deciding not to present the supposedly incriminating videos. Further, in a journalistic riposte to Reforma, Universal published the transcript of a recent telephone conversation between Ahumada and Rosario Robles, the gist of which was to deflate any expectations of new revelations in the material.

Finally, the videos have not been seen. They are assumed to be innocuous. The “attack” has not been clarified. It is assumed to have been staged. (This appears to be the leading hypothesis of the current follow up investigation by authorities.)

Ahumada, once seemingly backed by Los Pinos, heavy weight PAN legal talent including Fernandez de Ceballos, and Salinas himself, appeared to be operating on his own with only his immediate family and a few employees on his side. In fact, the media-oriented maneuver seemed torpid, inspired by desperation, without a clear strategic sense. The supposition is that Ahumada has been long since been abandoned as disposable by those in the anti-AMLO camp.

The debate

The limits of the rigid format were manifest in the second debate. Both Patricia Mercado and Roberto Campa appeared to have nothing new to say (see below for a reference to their remarkably positive showing in one of the post debate evaluations). Roberto Madrazo appeared to be doing well, this time, with what he didn’t do so well with the first debate – new coaches and good coaching, but he didn’t change the dynamic of the debate in any way.

Within the format, Felipe Calderón pushed and pushed to repeat each of his provocatively negative campaign points, and succeeded in doing so, with the only exception of the “Chávez parallel.” Up until the last part of the debate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador did not respond in kind and there was a sense of assumed civility commented on by various participants.

However, after repeating criticisms of the DF administration now and during AMLO’s tenure, and crossing a line in going after AMLO’s chauffer/coordinator and family in an ad hominon manner, Calderón succeeded in provoking a response. Carefully choosing words, AMLO presented as an example of unwarranted “privilege” and “influence” that Calderón’s brother-in-law (known to be close to and a partner of Calderón’s wife on projects) has experienced the kind of enrichment in the Fox Administration that is common historically to families “close to power” in Mexico. The brother-in-law, Diego Zavala, has done very well with government contracts and



has paid very little in taxes. The “energy sector” (read PEMEX) was mentioned as a source of the contracts.

At no point was Calderón personally accused of having authorized the contracts (though that is how Calderón is choosing to characterize the attack and his defense, see section below on the negative campaign themes). The debate closed, and this point of the “uncomfortable brother-in-law” seemed important, though not transcendent.

The post-debate polls

The recurring presence of Reforma using on line or telephone or special audience “polls” for partisan purposes appeared within minutes. Reforma announced that its own on-line poll of debate watchers showed Calderón the winner by far. This was reported widely throughout the media until the next day when a significant number of debate evaluation polls were available and it appeared that the two main candidates finished the debate as they had begun, i.e. with a dead heat in opinion.

A closer look at the immediately available Reforma poll indicates that it was a poll limited to subscribers of Reforma (a group which has a fairly clear definition in class and market sector terms), and was conducted on a site that cannot distinguish multiple voting. That is, a Reforma subscriber could successfully vote again and again and again for a particular preference. This may help explain why the results of the Reforma evaluation were (in order): Calderón, Mercado, Campa, Madrazo, López Obrador.²

At least four polling groups rushed into the field after the debate: Universal (polling Wednesday, Thursday and Friday after the debater), Milenio (polling from Tuesday through Sunday after the debate), Consulta Mitofsky (polling Wednesday through Sunday), and Reforma (polling Friday through Sunday). The results of their studies, with field dates for interview noted:

Media	Field Dates	Results		
El Universal	June 7-9, 2006	AMLO	34%	(down 2% from previous poll, published just before the debate)
		FCH	37%	(up 1% from previous poll)
		RMP	22%	(down 2% from previous poll)
Milenio	June 7-9, 2006	AMLO	34%	(up 1% from previous poll)
		FCH	31%	(down 2% from previous poll)
		RMP	30%	(down less than 1% from previous poll)

² At some point, the presentation of polls based on self-selected respondents within limited media subscription will be as discredited in Mexico as it is in other parts of the world where formal democracy is practiced.



Media	Field Dates	Results		
Consulta Mitofsky	June 8-11, 2006	AMLO	35%	(up 1% from previous poll, published before the debate)
		FCH	32%	(down 2% from previous poll)
		RMP	28%	(no change from previous poll)
Reforma	June 9-11, 2006	AMLO	37%	(up 2% from previous poll)
		FCH	35%	(down 4% from previous poll)
		RMP	23%	(up 1% from previous poll)

Commentary: In the presentation of the Universal poll, the newspaper's polling coordinator concludes his article admitting that by closing the field on June 9th, the poll may not reflect the story of the "uncomfortable brother-in-law" which has grown each day in the media. Further, it is clear that it takes a few days for a theme of this character to filter down into popular discussion.

Any news story, outside of a history making event, will become important if it is consistently repeated in the media, and then discussed amply and often among people whose opinions might be measured. The brother-in-law story was probably well reflected in its initial form by Saturday and Sunday, and is obviously taking an even clearer form this week. Thus, the Universal poll (by its own admission) may not have measured the post-debate story by closing field on June 9th. The other three polls by closing field on June 11th may have captured more of this dynamic. Otherwise, we have to look at different sampling dynamics to explain a 6% difference between FCH in Universal, 37% (up !% from previous poll) and FCH in Milenio, 31% (down 2% from previous poll).

The post-debate

It is increasingly irrelevant to refer to the debate itself, since it is the post-debate that dominates the news cycles. The post-debate is characterized by a series of challenges, defenses, counter-attacks and investigations related to the charge that a Calderón relative has benefited from his closeness to executive power in securing contracts and benefits.

Instead of going into details on the charges and responses (these matters will continue to aired over time), let's take a step back and review the various themes of negative campaigning on both sides in the current year.

Summary of the defining campaign issues, including negatives and attacks

We identify six waves of defining themes, attack ads or negative advertising on the part of the main candidates. They are summarized below. Three of them are associated with López



Obrador and three with Calderón. We begin our work with the notion that “negative advertising” does not exist in the abstract as a universal, but rather has a specific context.



1) January, 2006 to date AMLO: “Fox is the problem”

The theme advanced by López Obrador that “Fox is the problem” emphasizes the “alternative project for the nation”, and sets the debate as change versus continuity. AMLO has been on the national stage since 2001 as the anti-Fox or the not-Fox in terms of governance.

Most polls show a clear majority for change; the question is what kind of change and who should lead the process. López Obrador has not succeeded in occupying all of the space in public opinion calling for change. Even Calderón presents himself as a candidate of change, though within the context of continuity.

Nonetheless, the argument against the administration and the style of the President has been one of the factors that provoked the extreme activism of Fox to defend his legacy and secure credit for electing his successor. In any election, the outgoing office holder is an issue, however in this instance there is a sense that the “control” or “limiting” of the President has become necessary. The AMLO argument that “Fox is the problem” has thus become particularized with regard to his own campaign and generalized as part of the confirmation of the legitimate development of the process.

This is less negative campaigning than defining the terms of argument. It turned negative for time when AMLO, frustrated with Fox’ constant intervention in the campaign, called him a chattering turkey and told him to shut up.

2) March, 2006 FCH: “AMLO is Chávez”

The opening round in the response campaign for Calderón, after an assessment that his campaign was hopelessly floundering in January and February, was to use mass media for the clearly stated argument that “AMLO is Chávez.” The notion was not original with the Calderón campaign, having emerged at least a year ago in the context of the international business press trying to define López Obrador – is he a new Lula? or a Chávez?

From the reading of polls, it is fair to say that this ad theme crystallized the middle class fear of losing relative privilege in a socially divided Mexican society. Further, it was based on a news hook, the “chattering turkey” statements of AMLO that gave the appearance of a parallel with Chávez. The ad campaign became news itself, and this gave it legs in the media.

It was an effective opening gambit, but it only worked at the level of metaphor – a tricky problem for the Calderón people if they had to back up what is by all accounts a baseless charge in point of fact (i.e. that there is a “relation” between AMLO and Chávez). Further, the argument



sows seeds of current and future international bi-lateral problems with Venezuela specifically and Latin America generally, where the tradition is that a national campaign should not involve questions of other nations.

This was a quintessential attack and negative advertising theme. It worked for a time, even became news, but controversy around the ad established the notion of setting limits to attacks. In this instance, self-limitation within the rubric of free speech was not deemed adequate by the Electoral Tribunal, and the matter is now being played out into an evolving IFE policy of close monitoring of content and style in political advertising.

3) April, 2006 to date FCH: AMLO as “danger” to the Republic

The notion of “AMLO as ‘danger’ to the Republic” was not new either, having been suggested and rehearsed in various contexts for at least the past year. However, it appeared effective in deepening the anti-AMLO theme and advanced the negative campaign with an overarching argument, putting the politics, personality and temperament of AMLO under the magnifying glass.

The theme raised the question of what really constitutes a danger and tends over time to devalue the term. Further, it invites the opposition to put Calderón’s personality and temperament under the glass – an interesting prospect, given his well-established reputation.

While the vocabulary of “danger” is a sensitive one for the Mexican context, given the early stages of the transition, it seems more like campaign hyperbole to outside observers. In this sense, it required many journalists to not only recount the dynamics of the Mexican campaign to readers back home, but to explain its particular context as well.

4) May, 2006 to date FCH: DF as an urban disaster with debt and insecurity

The Federal District, Mexico City, is many things at once in this campaign. With at least some of the public works and social programs, it is a constant advertisement for López Obrador. It is also a potential source of a big majority of votes that would balance out some of the regions in which López Obrador is weak. And, it is a clear bastion of government power and resources that at least partially checks the access to federal power for the PAN candidate.

But, the DF is not utopia. It is filled with problems, and frustrated residents. Thus, it is inevitable that Calderón’s campaign should seek to remake the image of the DF. Arguing that the “DF as a disaster” further deepens the anti-AMLO theme, and provides a constant reference for the unhappy middle class in Mexico City.

Nonetheless, the campaign theme tends to divide Mexico City and the surrounding zone in a way that may enable AMLO to come out ahead (since his numbers continue to be strong in the



area). At the same time, it seems to undercut the relative autonomy of the PAN DF campaign, and certainly sets the stage for a constant tension should Calderón and Ebrad both win. The DF is a complicated symbol for the society, and the PAN's playing with this symbol seems at times ham-handed.

5) May, 2006 to date AMLO: FCH was one of authors of Fobaproa

López Obrador has focused on the bank bailout and Fobaproa issue since the second half of the 1990s as a critical defining issue. It links him to the debt-sensitive sectors of each social class. In Mexico there is not really a "debtor class", rather extensive debt sensitive regions and groupings. "FCH as an author of Fobaproa" builds on a theme associated with these dynamics.

The "overly lawyerly" defense of FCH ("I never signed anything.") does not help FCH get out from under the Fobaproa shadow. Narrow "technical" defenses are problematic in politics.

The use of this theme tends to confirm some in the banking community against his candidacy. However, since the post-electoral issue is not a judicial re-opening of Fobaproa but rather a public review through a truth commission, many in the foreign-bank dominated financial sector are not particularly nervous.

6) June, 2006 to date AMLO: FCH brother-in-law benefited from influences

The "uncomfortable brother-in-law" is illustrative of a key theme of the campaign, i.e. the need to end the privileges of those who are close to power. As with Fobaproa, FCH has a technical defense ("I didn't sign anything").

Once the impact of the "brother-in-law benefited from influences" story was realized, there has been a series of responses in the form of revelations of alleged wrong doing on the part of López Obrador. To date, none of these seem anything other than retreads of earlier stories, or contrived responses that only tend to underscore the impact of the brother-in-law story.

How Calderón and his campaign seem to have been surprised by this tactic is a mystery to me, and bespeaks some naivete on their part: how could you open a sharp and sustained saturation level attack and negative campaign against AMLO (Chávez, danger to Mexico, DF debt) without anticipating a response?

Any reader of *Primary Colors* or veteran of the US campaigns of 2000 and 2004 would advise you to hire someone independent to "investigate yourself" and be prepared to respond in detail. Sometimes qualities important for governance are made manifest in a campaign. When that happens, the campaign serves its purpose.



Pre-electoral preference surveys, media presentations



		Jan 2006	Feb 2006	Mar 2006	Apr 2006	My I 2006	My II 2006
Reforma	AMLO	40	38	41	35	33	35
	FCH	30	31	31	38	40	39
	RMP	26	29	25	23	22	22
Consulta (Televisa)	AMLO	39	39	38	34	Not Published	34
	FCH	31	30	31	35		34
	RMP	29	28	29	27		28
Universal	AMLO	40	39	42	38	35	36
	FCH	33	34	32	34	39	36
	RMP	26	25	24	25	21	24
GEA-ISA³	AMLO	35	41	34	31	Not Published	31
	FCH	35	32	36	41		40
	RMP	29	26	28	25		27
Excelsior⁴	AMLO	39	Not Published	40	35	34	36
	FCH	30		29	33	36	34
	RMP	29		29	28	26	27
Milenio (de las Heras)⁵	AMLO	37	36	38	Not Published	33	34
	FCH	31	31	29		36	33
	RMP	30	31	30		28	30
Crónica (Beltrán)⁶	AMLO	Not Published	37	36	Not Published	32	34
	FCH		30	34		37	34
	RMP		30	28		27	26

Dan Lund
President
MUND Américas



³ No formal media association, but regular presence in various outlets.

⁴ New sequence, in renovated version of Excelsior: collaboration of Parametría.

⁵ Not sponsored by the newspaper, but regularly appearing. Pollster associated with Madrazo.

⁶ Not sponsored by the newspaper, irregularly appearing. Pollster associated with Salinas, Zedillo.